



Lenin, writing

## All education is political

All education is political. Education prepares the individual child, and each entire new generation, to take its place within the polity. Education confirms the existing polity, reproducing it.

In 1983 somebody wrote:

*“At the base of the modern social order stands not the executioner but the professor. Not the guillotine, but the (aptly named) doctorate d’état is the main tool and symbol of state power. The monopoly of legitimate education is now more important, more central than the monopoly of legitimate violence” [Gellner, Nations and*

*nationalism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 1983, p. 34].

“Political Education” becomes a category separate from education in general, only because education belongs to the ruling system, under a certain ruling class. Even though it is a society in revolution, and its government is formed by a revolutionary liberation movement, it is not possible to teach what we call political education, in schools, in South Africa.

Nothing illustrates the nature of class power more clearly than this. The political education given in schools confirms the *status quo*. It is conservative and it is bourgeois. It does not even admit to being political.

“The taxpayer” is a bourgeois, and will only pay for political education that preserves the position of the bourgeoisie. In the nineteenth year after the first universal-franchise election in South Africa, this fact stares at us, but few of us stare back. The common critique of education is rather that it is not bourgeois enough.

Even those “radicals” who, for example, would expropriate land from white farmers on a large scale and without compensation, give little thought to the nature of education. The people who would settle on that land, if any, would be educated as bourgeois, would only be capable of reproducing a bourgeois economy on that land, and would demand the installation of bourgeois schools on that land. This would not be radical change, but it would be confirmation of the *status*

quo.

Is there any conception of what a revolutionary school might be? This second part of our course on education looks at some past conceptions of what it might be, starting with Lenin.

## **Lenin on Education**

*“...we have to abandon the old standpoint that education should be non-political; we cannot conduct educational work in isolation from politics.”*

*“That idea has always predominated in bourgeois society. The very term ‘apolitical’ or ‘non-political’ education is a piece of bourgeois hypocrisy...”*

*“In all bourgeois states the connection between the political apparatus and education is very strong, although bourgeois society cannot frankly acknowledge it.”*

*“We are living in an historic period of struggle against the world bourgeoisie, which is far stronger than we are. At this stage of the struggle, we have to safeguard the development of the revolution and combat the bourgeoisie in the military sense and still more by means of our ideology through education, so that the habits, usages and convictions acquired by the working class in the course of many decades of struggle for political*

*liberty - the sum total of these habits, usages and ideas - should serve as an instrument for the education of all working people. It is for the proletariat to decide how the latter are to be educated. We must inculcate in the working people the realisation that it is impossible and inexcusable to stand aside in the proletariat's struggle..."*

*"We must re-educate the masses; they can be re-educated only by agitation and propaganda. The masses must be brought, in the first place, into the work of building the entire economic life. That must be the principal and basic object in the work of each agitator and propagandist, and when he realises this, the success of his work will be assured."*

The above words are taken from Lenin's speech to the 1920 All-Russian Conference of Political Education Workers, our main text for this part.

Lenin does not leave his audience in doubt as to his intentions.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Lenin, Speech to All-Russia Political Education Workers Conference, 1920](#).
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